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ABSTRACT

A recent study profiles the American journalist as young, male, white, educated, and coming from a solid middle- or upper-middle-class background. Women and minority groups are grossly underrepresented in the field of journalism. Other studies present parallels between the topics that are selected as newsworthy and the characteristics of those who gather and edit the news, revealing that the selective perception of the reporter does influence what becomes news. Other factors that color the individual reporter's approach to the news include reasons for entering the profession, motivation for staying on the job, personal values and professional ethics, mood, intelligence, imagination, and the competitive, self-protective atmosphere of the newsroom. Fearing a loss of credibility with the public, today's reporter faces problems in verifying all information, defining an ethical position toward sources and the public, deciding a personal role as a private citizen, and guarding relationships and affairs from conflict-of-interests charges. (MAI)

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 395

THE REPORTER'S CONTROL OF NEWS

This report was written by Cheryl Riley Powell, who recently received an M.A. degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Introduction

Even with modern technology, the heartbeat of the news process is still the reporter — that individual who seeks out information, conducts interviews, rummages through records and then writes the story. The public is dependent upon this individual for its news of what is happening in the world today.

However, the reading and listening public of the 1970s is a much more skeptical and critical audience, and the American reporter is finding his job, his lifestyle, his personal life, even his character scrutinized and analyzed by the public and by the journalism profession as a whole. The media have begun taking a more critical look from the inside since November 1969, when Vice President Spiro T. Agnew delivered (New York Times, 11-14-69) his now-famous speech attacking the media for bias and distortion in the coverage of news. Most alarming to the media was the public support he received. Calls to ABC ran (Detroit Free Press, 11-15-69) 60 to 40 in Agnew's favor; NBC reported its calls were 57 to 43 in favor of Agnew.

A Pandora's box was opened. Out came the critics with questions such as: Who are these news people? How do they function? What is their involvement with government? What guarantees do we have of their neutrality on the issues they report? Is there a parallel between what is reported as news and the people who report it?

The answers have been slow in coming and are not complete. This paper will examine such questions and study how the reporter controls the information he collects and reports by who he is, how he performs his job, where he places his allegiances and what he does with his leisure time.

Who Is the American Reporter?

The stereotyped old-time, "Front Page" reporter was a middle-aged man who was hard-working, hard-drinking, chain-smoking and always on the run in his trench coat to

scoop his competitors at all costs. He was a hard-core newspaperman who learned his trade through experience on the job. How realistic is that picture today?

A study conducted in 1971 by three sociologists resulted in a representative overview of the nature of newsmen and newswork in contemporary America. For the study, extensive interviews were conducted with 1,313 practicing journalists in radio, television, wire services, syndicates, newsmagazines, daily and weekly newspapers and the alternative media. The results of the study comprise the book *The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work*.

The News People paints a portrait of the 69,500 full-time personnel working within the news media. Seventy-five percent of these work in the print sector, another 20 percent in the broadcast media and about five percent in the wire services. Over half are employed by daily newspapers. The authors point out that recent research evidence indicates that the public relies more on television than on newspapers for information, yet this medium is staffed by only about 7,000 people.¹

The national study found that news people in America tend to be young, male, white, and from solid middle- or upper-middle-class social backgrounds. Journalistic manpower is concentrated both in numbers and in influence in the Northeast, and more specifically in New York City. Journalistic manpower is therefore disproportionately concentrated in urban areas.² An actual majority, 56.3 percent, of journalists are in their 20s or 30s. Men in journalism outnumber women by a ratio of 4-to-1 (2-to-1 is the ratio in the total full-time labor force). Close to two-thirds of journalists are of Anglo-Saxon, West European or Scandinavian descent. Only 3.9 percent of news media personnel are black.³

Jews appear to be overrepresented in prominent media, and blacks and women are underrepresented. Both blacks and women face even greater difficulties in being promoted to managerial positions in any news organization. The sample for the study failed to locate a single black American in a supervisory position within a prominent organization.⁴

Journalists with no college training are becoming increasingly rare. The study determined that journalists are obtaining more and more education, with 86 percent of

Summary:



The American reporter is an important source of what is determined to be news. By the nature of his background, his personal characteristics, the pressures of his job, his ethical stance and his personal life, he exerts considerable control over the information he disseminates.

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contemporary news people having attended college for one or more years and 58.2 percent being college graduates. Their education, however, is not necessarily in journalism. In fact, journalism majors are outnumbered about 2-to-1 by persons with other types of college training, and those in the field tend to recommend a substantive academic background as being preferable to professional training.⁵

The greatest mobility in the profession is among broadcast newsmen, who not only are more likely to leave the organizations they start with, but also are more likely to make subsequent job changes. Rarely do newsmen switch from print to broadcast and vice versa. Journalists are more mobile than persons in most occupations. Most migrating Americans are pulled westward, but journalists are pulled both east and west toward the coastal regions where the large news organizations are located.⁶

Within the profession, there appear to be two major career tracks. For some, careers follow an "administrative" path leading to supervisory and managerial roles in which newsmen acquire considerable power and status but have little visibility as individual journalists. The second career route, the "professional" one, leads to more individualized and personalized journalistic roles. Those who choose this path become "experts" or "personalities" such as syndicated columnists or anchormen.⁷

After conducting the extensive study, the researchers expressed both optimism and concern for the quality of manpower in American journalism. They were impressed by the quality of talent entering the field, but concerned about the news media's ability to hold their most promising recruits.

We would estimate that between a fifth and a quarter of experienced young editorial personnel in the news media today seriously question their commitment to remain in the field. More important, perhaps, it would appear to be the most qualified young journalists who most seriously entertain thoughts of leaving.⁸

Economic grievances are not always the reason for leaving. The most promising and well-trained people are attracted to the field by an image of professional practice that, in large part, is incompatible with organization realities. Newsmen face the dilemma of wanting the autonomy that is more prevalent in smaller organizations, as well as the prestige and good salaries that only larger organizations usually can provide.

What the Reporter Sees as News

... one cannot but be struck by certain parallels between the classes of phenomena which become news topics in our society, and the characteristics of those who gather and edit news.⁹

In their concluding comments, the sociologists stress that who the American newsmen is does influence what becomes news:

If it is true, as critics have argued, that our media give disproportionate attention to the affairs of established groups in the society, to events, such as sports, which are of interest primarily to men, and

to experiences in the urban environment, then these propensities are entirely consistent with the social and geographic makeup of news-media personnel. Who and where the people are who gather and assemble the news, in other words, can significantly influence what is portrayed as newsworthy by the media. As has been observed before, the media may not be able to tell us what to think, but by the emphasis they give to or withhold from events, they very effectively tell us what to think about.¹⁰

Are critics justified, therefore, in their complaints that news has a definite liberal "WASP" slant? Edith Efron, author of *The News Twisters*, and Milton Freidman are two critics who have claimed repeatedly that the media are too liberal. U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisholm accused (*New York Times*, 11-1-77) the press of not telling the public the full truth about the Allan Bakke case because the press is controlled by white males. *New York Daily News* editor Michael J. O'Neill told a Women in Communications, Inc. chapter that newspapers are too masculine in their content, style, policy and management. He accused newspapers of underplaying the women's movement and blamed it in part on "male dominated editorial departments and managements."¹¹

The American Conservative Union has become so distressed at what it interprets to be a leftist tilt to the American news media, that it has established (*Des Moines Register*, 2-20-78) a National Journalism Center and is soliciting funds to train young reporters-to-be in the philosophy of the right wing. The project is the brainchild of M. Stanton Evans, a conservative journalist and former ACU chairman, who strongly believes that American media show "little understanding of our nation's traditional values and of the workings of the free enterprise economy." He blames lack of understanding and liberal bias on educational settings that are hostile to free enterprise.

During the heat of the Nixon administration's conflict with the press and Agnew's outspoken criticism, Howard K. Smith of ABC News said, "If Agnew says something, it's bad, regardless of what he says."¹² University of Massachusetts speech Professor Timothy P. Meyer decided to test Smith's statement and constructed an experiment to identify the presence or absence of such bias in the media and its subsequent effects on audience perceptions.

Meyer selected a television program (the David Frost show aired in September 1970) that featured Spiro Agnew and five student dissenters in an unrehearsed exchange of views and the *New York Times'* account of the program, which was 18 column inches. There appeared to be obvious discrepancies in the two, and Meyer predicted that people seeing the exchange on television would perceive it substantially differently from people who read the newspaper account without seeing the program. His subjects were 120 undergraduates. (Meyer already had determined in a pre-test that the majority of college students held negative attitudes toward Agnew.)

The most striking result is the vast discrepancy between the attitudinal effects of the program as compared to the newspaper account. College students who only read the newspaper's account showed evidence of further polarization and reinforcement of their attitudes against Agnew. ... In direct contrast, those seeing the program judged Agnew as a more reliable source of information about his opponents and their statements, agreed that Agnew approves of non-violent dissent, that he was more sincere in his attempts to communicate

with student dissenters, that he was more effective in his ability to communicate with student dissenters, and that he was a more competent Vice President. In brief, students who saw the program judged Agnew in a more positive light, while students who read about the program saw Agnew in a more negative light.¹³

Meyer concluded that the New York Times reporter who wrote the story on the program was a victim of selective perception. He advocates more research to determine if the problem identified in his experiment is representative of an overall liberal bias in newspapers.

Future research needs to probe far more deeply into the process of news reporter selectivity and subsequent effects on viewers. This type of research is essential because media apparently can govern our behavior toward them. Perhaps a liberal bias in the reporting process not only reinforces liberal attitudes of readers, but it may also be a major contributor to initial development of liberal attitudes.¹⁴

Chances are the New York Times reporter did not deliberately set out to write a slanted story on Agnew's performance. And he certainly did not have the advantages the televised program had of letting Agnew speak solely for himself while viewers could both see and hear firsthand his comments. Still, the disturbing possibility remains that unconsciously a reporter may be slanting his articles in the direction of his own bias.

Lou Cannon in his book *Reporting: An Inside View* says reporters should have "fairness" as their guideline, not "objectivity." Fairness, he says, requires the reporter to be alert for biases, including his own. It requires the reporter to say, in the words of the late Chicago Daily News reporter Peter Lisagor,

Hell, we're not created out of some kind of a cookie cutter that robs us of our biases and prejudices. We're talking about an unreal world if we believe we could produce a group of journalists who have no biases, prejudices, attitudes and outlooks. There is a degree of professionalism we bring to our job and if there isn't, we oughtn't to be here. Our papers oughtn't to have us here. And we have no business in journalism.¹⁵

Personal Characteristics

It is a crazy and wonderful occupation, sometimes oppressive and sometimes oppressed, full of excitement, frustrations, newness and the possibility of high purpose.¹⁶

Not every reporter may agree with Ben Bagdikian's description of the "Joy of Journalism." Yet every reporter has his own reasons for becoming a journalist, his own motivations that compel him to stay on the job, his own set of values and ethics for his professional behavior. These characteristics, as well as a reporter's mood, tiredness, intelligence, imagination and conceptual ability, play an important role in shaping the news of the day.¹⁷

Cannon lists several reasons why reporters go into the profession: parental influence, a wish to have some social impact on the world, attractions of the byline and of being in on things, curiosity and a desire to explain things to their

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fellow human beings.¹⁸ Washington Post editor Howard Simon says, "Begin with the premise that lots of people who come into the newspaper business are somewhat hyperactive, somewhat creative and somewhat caustic."¹⁹

Washington Post managing editor Benjamin C. Bradlee looks first for energy when he hires reporters and says he is "depressed by the number of bright young people who don't have the desire to work the hard and long hours that I think the business requires."²⁰ He also looks for commitment and people who will take work home with them, for knowledge and ability, judgment and the quality of putting information in perspective.

Whatever a reporter's reasons for choosing his profession, whatever drives him to do his job will eventually be tested by the frustrations of the business, and how a reporter responds to the pressure may be important to his reader. When sociologist Chris Argyris conducted an extensive study of the bureaucracy of the New York Times (named the *Daily Planet* in his book about the study, *Behind the Front Page*), he found the reporters to be competitive, distrustful of one another, self-centered, pessimistic about changing the system and totally committed to satisfying their own goals.

Since it is difficult to express tension, frustration and dissatisfaction, these feelings may be suppressed or sublimated. To the extent they are suppressed, persons will spend much energy building up and maintaining personal defenses against blowing up. To the extent that they are sublimated, persons may become "carriers" of low morale and seek to infect others; they may work very hard and take out their aggression in the kinds of stories they write. . . or they may work long, hard hours. . . in order to prove their loyalty.²¹

For some reason that researchers and press critics cannot quite explain, reporters seem to be especially self-protective of letting others know how they do their jobs. One critic titled her article "Paranoia in the News Room?" because she thinks journalistic self-protection seems to border on paranoia at times.

At least this is the impression of some widely known academicians who study the U.S. news media. Over the past few years each has encountered opposition — if not hostility — to his or her research efforts. Collectively, the experiences of these researchers suggest that a profession priding itself on investigative reporting can be incredibly touchy about being studied.²²

David Shaw, reporter and press critic for the Los Angeles Times whose critiques of the newspaper industry are printed on the front page, says he has had great difficulty getting newspaper people to talk with him or answer his calls. Such resistance has led him to the conclusion that

newspaper reporters and editors are not one whit better than politicians, crooks, businessmen, athletes, doctors or lawyers when it comes to dealing with the press. They are guarded, suspicious, and quick to tell me "no comment," "I was misquoted," "I was quoted out of context" or "I didn't realize I was being interviewed."²³

The Nature of the Job

Veteran reporter Lou Cannon describes the incredible pressure of getting the story and getting it first. Such pressure can push a reporter not to check all his facts, not to verify his information completely or to take other dangerous shortcuts. Cannon says he remembers that he was so involved at the Washington Post in the investigation of Agnew's alleged criminal activity that he became "vastly more concerned with Getting The Story than with the consideration of whether Agnew's accusers were motivated by self-interest."²⁴

The nature of his job dictates that a reporter will be besieged with frustrations. Uncertainty is the greatest frustration.

No matter what paper he works for, a reporter always writes with imperfect knowledge of events. Are the facts straight? What do they mean? Has everyone who knows anything been called? How much of the background material should go into the story? How reliable is the source? What is missing?²⁵

Edward Jay Epstein has described (*National Observer*, 4-20-74) journalists as being in a simple, but inescapable bind:

Journalists are rarely, if ever, in a position to establish the truth about an issue for themselves, and they are therefore almost entirely dependent on self-interested "sources" for the version of reality that they report.

What Epstein advocates is that journalists give up the pretense of being establishers of truth and recognize themselves as agents for others who want to disclose information.

A reporter also is frustrated by knowing that no matter how carefully he tries, he will be inaccurate and incomplete at times. And when he is, he faces the humiliation of being proven wrong, which is especially humiliating if a competitor catches his mistake. And the temptations always are present to hype a lead, make a flat statement instead of qualifying it or present a story as complete when it really isn't.²⁶ How a reporter copes with the frustrations of his profession quietly influences his work.

After eight months in Washington, D.C., reporter Tom Wicker discovered that he himself had encountered

the deadliest enemy of the Washington reporter — perhaps of any reporter — the desire to be recognized, to have access where others were denied, to be on the inside, a part of things, to belong to the world of power and influence and decision, no matter how peripherally.²⁷

Temptations are immense on the Washington scene, and elsewhere, and Wicker says reporters are only human and have

about as much ambition, competitive fire, desire for status and affluence, fear, caution, ethics, honesty, and guile as the rest of the human race. Therefore they can be, and often are, manipulated,

threatened, rewarded, punished, cajoled and conned into doing what their news sources want them to do — sometimes without even realizing that they have been any of the above.²⁸

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Thomas Powers says there is an angel and a troll at work in each reporter. The angel is the "innocent being of selfless spirit which loves the truth for its own sake." But the troll "wants to be not just loved but envied, not just recognized but lionized." He says, "It's the angel in a journalist who writes a story of genuine feeling or insight, and it's the troll who hopes to profit from it. The mix varies."²⁹

Defining an Ethical Position

Not all reporters share the same values or employ the same techniques in gathering news. Some reporters subscribe to the theory that, in most cases, "the end justifies the means." These reporters sometimes are willing to hide their identity, bluff, tape private conversations, listen at keyholes or pose as someone else to get information. "If the ethics of gathering facts are subjected to strict standards of 'fair play,' the public will frequently be the loser," says one reporter.³⁰ Most reporters, however, draw a line when it comes to breaking the law in newsgathering activities. While some might go ahead and break the law on occasion, they realize that if they do, they usually are on their own.

Some American reporters have had to face the dilemma of where to place their loyalties — to their country or to their profession. Recent disclosures of journalists' involvement with the CIA revealed some of the problems reporters have faced. *Rolling Stone* magazine published Carl Bernstein's expose, "The CIA and the Media," in which he reported that more than 400 American journalists, including such famous people as C.L. Sulzberger, William S. Paley, Henry Luce, and Stewart and Joseph Alsop, have carried out secret assignments for the CIA since 1947.³¹

Another account reported (*New York Times*, 12-25-77) that a smaller number of journalists were actually involved. Their involvement ranged from paid part-time agents to unaware informants considered "friendly assets" by the CIA. According to CIA officials, most of the journalists participating were stringers and free-lance writers.

Both the media and the CIA have denied (*New York Times*, 12-27-77) any wrongdoing, pointing out that during the Cold War it was acceptable to cooperate with each other in ways that are now deemed inappropriate and unacceptable. Cooperation did not look strange then, they say. Cooperation, in fact, was useful to both parties. The CIA frequently had information that was not otherwise available to journalists, and the press provided a much needed cover for CIA activities. The press could go places and ask questions that would have cast suspicion on intelligence agents.

Relationships between journalists and the CIA were almost always informal with no signed contracts. In some instances, journalists were not even aware that they were considered assets by the CIA. But when a reporter did agree to help directly, he was provided with training in the "tradecraft" of espionage, the use of secret writing, how to conduct surveillance or arrange for clandestine meetings. The assignments given journalists usually amounted to writing longer, more detailed versions of the dispatches they filed with their news organizations. But there were instances when reporters were used in delicate intelligence operations.

Public furor since the disclosures has pressured the CIA to change its policy. CIA Director Stansfield Turner has issued (*Washington Star*, 12-31-77) new regulations enforcing a

prohibition on paying full- or part-time journalists accredited by a U.S. news organization. The media have criticized (Louisville Courier-Journal, 12-31-77) the new rules for not also prohibiting CIA relationships with foreign journalists.

Most of the media have spoken out against continued use of journalists in CIA activities. They sanction (Los Angeles Times, 12-9-77) contact with the CIA to obtain information, but not steady, paid relationships. Such relationships, the media say, cast suspicion on reporters in the eyes of foreign governments. Most journalists recognize (Kansas City Times, 12-29-77) the importance of seeking CIA information and expertise, but they believe their duty as journalists is to keep their independence.

A New York Times editorial said (12-27-77) such a relationship was wrong both practically and philosophically:

American readers have a right to assurance that the journalists they trust for information are not in any sense accountable to unseen paymasters. And foreign sources of news and the international consumers of American news have a right to expect that governmental purposes do not influence the process of reporting and editing.

The Reporter as Private Citizen

What should be the reporter's role in his community? Should he participate in civic affairs? Should he make political contributions? Should he march in demonstrations or stand back and observe? Opinions differ among reporters, editors and community leaders as to how much of an activist role, if any, a reporter should take in his community.

Press critic David Shaw conducted (Los Angeles Times, 2-27-78) more than 100 interviews to survey opinions on the question of rights, privileges, responsibilities and limitations of journalists as public citizens. His findings indicate that virtually all journalists are concerned about conflict of interest, but editors are more cautious than reporters, while community leaders encourage involvement on the part of journalists in the community.

Generally, nonpartisan civic leaders tended to favor a great deal of involvement by journalists; politicians tended to favor somewhat less; editors wanted virtually none; reporters were widely divergent in their views.

Bill Moyers, former press secretary for President Johnson and now with CBS Reports, says journalists — because they have to try to be impartial — must use "self-imposed moderation in the exercise of their legal rights." A.M. Rosenthal, executive editor of the New York Times, says reporters must pretty much give up any political activity beyond voting. He sees it as the price paid for being in the business. Eugene C. Patterson, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, says, "I don't accept any appointments now. I don't serve on any commissions or boards or committees or anything. I even resigned from the fine arts museum."

But John Chancellor of NBC News calls the current posture of noninvolvement "post-Watergate piety" and says he thinks it is unnecessary, counterproductive and hypocritical. Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. says, "You shouldn't have to take the veil and become a political eunuch just because you're a journalist." U.S. Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif., says,

I know journalists have the same kind of conflict-of-interest problems, but when you don't have

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anything to do with the people and institutions you're writing about — when you don't get involved in civic affairs and the local school board campaign — you lose touch with what people actually think and do and want and need.

The fear of reporters and editors is loss of credibility in the eyes of the public. Reporter Robert Scheer of the Los Angeles Times thinks reporters should acknowledge their biases:

That's what makes us good reporters — passionate feelings. A reporter who loves or hates what he's writing about will do a better job than someone who doesn't care.

But press critic Ben Bagdikian says,

It is possible for journalists to sign a petition for the impeachment of the President and still cover the President fairly. But it's asking the public too much to believe it.

While those in the profession cannot agree on the proper role of the reporter as activist, those in power continue to take action. A Louisville Courier-Journal editor asked one of his reporters to resign his office in a neighborhood association to avoid any conflict of interest. The New York Times took a reporter off all political assignments when his wife began to work actively for one of the candidates.

The Lewiston Morning Tribune in Idaho may have found (St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 4-14-78) a compromise to the dilemma. The newspaper did a story on itself, interviewing reporters, editors and the publisher and discussing whether activities (which it listed) of the editorial staff posed conflicts of interest that would violate journalistic ethics.

Friendships and Other Affairs

The dilemma is obvious: unless reporters get to know officials and sources fairly well — enough to build a relationship of mutual trust — they will not get more than routine information. But when the relationship becomes social or crosses the line into friendship, there is always the chance that reporters, being human, will tend to hold back on criticizing those officials. . . . The problem, put simply, is how to extract information without selling one's soul.³²

Determining the dividing line between friendship and professionalism can be difficult. For some reporters, however, the dividing line is insignificant, for they see their social relationships as a useful means of gathering news. White House correspondent Nancy Dickerson dated Senators John Kennedy, Henry "Scoop" Jackson and Kenneth Keating and claimed, "It is hard to keep one's social life separate from one's professional life."³³

Not maintaining a dividing line, however, could have serious results, as it did for Laura Foreman, a political reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer who became involved (Chicago Sun-Times, 9-22-77) romantically with state senator and political boss Henry Cianfrani, a man who was a key source and major subject of many of the stories she covered. Her affair with Cianfrani included accepting a reported

\$20,000 worth of gifts from him. When news of the affair and the gifts broke, Foreman was no longer working at the *Inquirer* but had gone to work for the *New York Times*. A.M. Rosenthal, the *Times* executive editor, defended Foreman at first, then asked for her resignation after the full story was publicized.

Her usefulness as a reporter was at an end. She could not cover anything for us anymore without embarrassing herself and the paper. It was a very unhappy thing.

Whether her relationship affected her writing is not the issue. There is no way of demonstrating that or of ever knowing that. Nor was the issue her personal relationship with this man.

It was the fact she had an affair, accepted gifts and continued to write about him that matters. That was unacceptable.

Foreman was hospitalized (*Boston Globe*, 10-4-77) with a "mental and emotional collapse" following her resignation. Some of the people who have come to Foreman's defense have argued that she is being judged by standards that do not apply to men and that such a situation could not have happened to a man.

Most reporters, however, seem to realize that friendships can become sticky conflict-of-interest problems. They realize credibility may be hurt by appearances.

Unfortunately, some situations are not always easy to define. Timothy Crouse talks about the "pack journalism" that is prevalent among the reporters who follow political candidates on the campaign trail. He expresses fear that reporters begin to acquire a vested interest in the candidates they cover, because they might get the coveted White House beat if their man wins.³⁴

A study by Susan Heilmann Miller on the relationship of reporters and Congressmen has revealed that

the work of Congressmen, aides and reporters is sometimes inherently, unavoidably symbiotic. Reporters assisted officials by the stories they

wrote — whether they chose to or not. And reporters were largely dependent on officials and their staffs for the information on which those stories were based.³⁵

Miller says the relationship was complementary because reporters wanted certain types of information, and people in Congress were willing to provide it because they wanted publicity. The reporter sometimes is forced to play the game. An aide of one Congressman is quoted as saying:

Any time the amount of information is great, or it's an on-going thing, a reporter isn't going to screw you because you'd cut him off. . . . And if a reporter screws you, you not only cut him off, but you send out the word and he's really in trouble. Very few politicians are going to be candid with a reporter if they know he screwed somebody for a mundane story with a two-day embargo on it.³⁶

The careful reporter is learning to keep a tidy house; in other words, no skeletons in the closet. Such innocent activities as an expense-paid trip compliments of a local travel firm, season tickets for the home team or passes to the local theater are being declined by some reporters and newspapers. Under the ever-watchful eye of the public and their own press critics, some reporters have decided (*Los Angeles Times*, 2-27-78) they must be like Caesar's wife — above even a hint of suspicion.

Conclusion

The newsrooms of America are filling with younger, better educated, more mobile reporters. These reporters cannot help but exert considerable influence and control over the flow of information. Although in the last decade journalists have come under severe attacks for bias, distortion and selective perception in their news coverage, the reporter who is aware of the pitfalls and his own precarious position will be better able not to influence the news unfairly.

Perhaps what needs to be recognized, or at least reiterated here, is that the reporter is human, with both strengths and weaknesses. He cannot be completely neutral, a "political eunuch" as one person described it. A reporter's personal bias, therefore, need not be denied, just controlled.

FOOTNOTES

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-26.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-47.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-71.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
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21. Chris Argyris, *Behind the Front Page* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974), p. 40.
22. Susan H. Miller, "Paranoia in the News Room?," *Mass Communications Review*, Summer, 1976, pp. 7-8.
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24. Cannon, p. 29.
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